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Before the Senate Democratic Policy and Communications Committee

**Voting Rights Under Fire: Democratic Ideas to Protect and Strengthen Americans' Constitutional Right to Vote**

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3:00pm

Thank you, Senator Stabenow, for the invitation to address this committee today to discuss the ways we can protect and strengthen Americans' Constitutional right to vote.

As you know, I am the former Secretary of State of West Virginia where I took very seriously the work of expanding voting rights to the citizens of my state with a forward-thinking approach. Now I have the opportunity to advocate for many of those same initiatives at the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law.

Here is just some of the work we did in West Virginia:

- West Virginia has had **early voting** since 2002, but in 2009 we implemented satellite or community voting during the early voting period that expanded voting opportunities. Many people now refer to them as Vote Centers.
  - This allows county election officials to offer additional early voting locations away from the primary courthouse location.
  - A voter from any precinct who enters the vote center, is given the ballot that pertains to them and then votes it.
  - Early voting reduces stress on the voting system on Election Day, alleviates administrative burdens and reduces voter frustration.
- We also modernized the election process through **online voter registration**.
  - It upgrades the outdated paper-based systems, increases convenience, prevents voting barriers because of registration, reduces errors on registration lists and saves taxpayer money. And simply, people like it.
- **Automatic voter registration** is a common-sense bipartisan approach that we passed in West Virginia in 2016.
  - With AVR, eligible citizens who interact with government agencies are registered to vote unless they decline.
  - This innovative policy that the Brennan Center developed more than a decade ago, boosts registration rates, cleans up the rolls, makes voting more convenient, and reduces the potential for voter fraud, all while lowering costs.

Why is getting people registered to vote so important? Yes, they can now go to the polls, but it's also where true voter engagement begins.

- A registered voter receives election mailings - whether they are voter guides from the state or local election official or information from candidates and organizations.
  - They are now a more informed electorate.
- With registered voters, resources are shifted from voter registration drives to ‘get out the vote’ efforts that encourages voters to participate.
  - There is more interaction – as an example, people are knocking on doors of registered voters and engaging them.
- From an administrative standpoint, election officials have a steadier stream of people who are registering to vote rather than a crush at the end.
  - That crush causes mistakes, over worked employees, the need for temp workers and frustrated voters.

Madam chairwoman, these examples are ways to defend and expand the voting rights of eligible Americans. I look forward to a robust discussion on these and more reforms. I will gladly take questions.

Thank you again for the invitation.